
Health Care & Wellness Committee

ESSB 5601

Brief Description: Regulating speech-language pathology assistants.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senator Franklin).

<p>Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishes a licensure program for speech-language pathology assistants.
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Hearing Date: 3/24/09

Staff: Jim Morishima (786-7191)

Background:

A speech-language pathologist is a professional who treats human communication disorders affecting speech, language, and swallowing. Speech-language pathologists are subject to licensure by the Board of Hearing and Speech (Board), which consists of 11 members, two of whom must be licensed speech-language pathologists. The minimum qualifications for licensure as a speech-language pathologist include a master's degree or doctorate from a Board-approved institution of higher education, a supervised clinical practicum experience, and post-graduate professional work experience approved by the Board. The Board may also require that speech language pathologists comply with continuing competency requirements.

Licensure as a speech-language pathologist is currently not required for speech-language pathology services provided in schools. Instead, speech-language pathologists who practice in schools must be certified by the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board as educational staff associates.

A speech-language pathology assistant performs delegated tasks at the direction, and under the supervision, of licensed speech-language pathologists (or certified educational staff associates). Speech-language pathology assistants are not credentialed in Washington.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In response to legislation introduced in 2007, the Department of Health (DOH) conducted a sunrise review. The DOH concluded that speech-language pathology assistants be certified, rather than licensed.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning one year from the effective date of the act, no person may represent himself or herself as a speech-language pathology assistant unless he or she is licensed by the Board. In order to qualify for licensure as a speech-language pathology assistant, a person must either:

- have an associate's degree, or a certificate of proficiency, from a speech-language pathology assistant program from an institution of higher education approved by the Board as evidenced by:
 - transcripts showing 45 quarter hours or 30 semester hours of speech-language pathology coursework; and
 - transcripts showing 45 quarter hours or 30 semester hours of general education credit; or
- have a bachelor's degree from a speech, language, and hearing program from an institution of higher education approved by the Board.

In lieu of these requirements, an applicant may meet the requirements for licensure if, within one year of the effective date of the act, he or she submits a competency checklist to the Board and is employed under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist for at least 600 hours within the last three years as defined by the Board by rule. The Board may require that all licensed speech-language pathology assistants comply with continuing competency requirements.

A licensed speech-language pathology assistant must provide speech-language pathology services under the direction and supervision of a licensed speech-language pathologist or a certified educational staff associate. The Board must designate the procedures and tasks that licensed speech-language pathology assistants may perform under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed speech-language pathologist. A licensed speech-language pathology assistant may only perform procedures or tasks delegated by licensed speech-language pathologists and must follow the individualized education program or treatment plan. Speech-language pathology assistants may not perform procedures or tasks that require diagnosis, evaluation, or clinical interpretation.

Licensed speech-language pathologists are subject to licensure and discipline by the Board. The membership of the Board is increased to include one advisory, non-voting member who is a licensed speech-language pathology assistant.

The term “hearing health care professional” is defined as a licensed audiologist or hearing instrument fitter/dispenser or a licensed physician specializing in diseases of the ear.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.